

Law Firm Sales: Preparing for Client and Prospect Meetings to Win

By [Silvia L. Coulter](#) on August 9, 2022

Benjamin Franklin once said, “If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.”

These are words every lawyer planning prospective and existing client visits needs to take under advisement. Busy lawyers tend to run from meeting to meeting, many ‘winging it’ when it comes to building relationships to win new business.

Having a game plan for business development meetings is the most important tactic for improving the odds of winning new business. Too many lawyers prepare for meetings by planning their ‘pitches’ versus preparing to ask good questions that will help them understand client and prospect needs. In fact, a ‘needs assessment’—as it is termed in the sales world—is the most important stage of the sales process. Asking good questions will allow for the opportunity to really understand the goals of the business, the issues at hand, and/or the legal department.

Here are some pointers for preparing properly for ‘pitch meetings,’ which really should not be focused on the pitch at all.

Understand the current state. Before exploring the heart of a needs assessment, we are best prepared by having some background information. What is the current state of the relationship between the client/prospect and the firm? What has been the history of the relationship? Who else at the firm has relationships with the company? Get a sense of the big picture before any conversations. If meeting with a client, what is their legal spend and which firms are in the client’s inner circle? If meeting with a prospective client, dig into the research to find out which firms they are currently using for specific matters and cases.

Discuss clear meeting objectives. What is the client’s understanding of why you are meeting? Plan ahead by preparing some good questions to learn about the prospective/client’s goals, objectives, business trends, challenges, and expectations. Answers to these questions provide an opportunity to then discuss how the firm and its team may proactively anticipate related legal needs. Pitching services too early could result in the meeting ending on a flat note. Something like: “Thank you for meeting with us today. We will keep you in mind for the future.” This response is like ending up at a dead end. Work to gain the client’s confidence in the firm and its team by showing interest and being prepared with good questions. Be clear about the meeting objectives.

- **Client’s key objectives:** Simplify the company and focus on cost reduction
- **Client’s related strategies/tactics:**
 - o \$650MM CapX reduction beginning in 20XX
 - o Real estate asset disposition
 - o Reduction in force (RIF)
- **Related issues/challenges (aka the firm’s opportunity to help):**
 - o Not able to dispose of assets
 - o Separating the debt from the asset (e.g., contractual restrictions)
 - o Employment issues resulting from workforce reduction
 - o Balancing the company’s interest and desire for sustainability with the need for cost reduction
- **The firm’s proposed services** (bridging the ‘pitch’ to specific identified opportunities)

- o Transactions (e.g., disposition of assets)
- o Assessment with client of CapX structure and need to address it—helping them address this
- o Assisting with debt reduction planning
- o Alternative Fee Arrangements

Identify a clear next step. When a meeting goes well, everyone is enthusiastic. Be sure to ask about the next step and the best way of keeping in touch with the prospective/client. Also, be clear that the firm is interested in helping them with their goals. A good question to ask is: “We would welcome the opportunity to work with [name of company]...what should our next step be?” Try to focus on asking questions people have to answer versus those that might elicit a simple “yes” or “no.” The latter leaves everyone hanging.

By proactively preparing for business development meetings with questions that facilitate a dialog—allowing then for the lawyers to discuss what they’d hope to during the meeting—outcomes are clearer, opportunities will emerge, and the firm will have accomplished its goal.

This simple plan is the way to increase wins.

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